

The Civilian War: Confederate Women and Union Soldiers During Sherman's March

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Review

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Frank, Lisa Tendrich *The Civilian War: Confederate Women and Union Soldiers during Sherman's March*. Louisiana State University Press, \$42.50
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Resistance and Confederate Patriotism in the Face of Sherman's March

In *The Civilian War*, Lisa Tendrich Frank examines the impact of Union soldiers' interactions with elite white women in Georgia and the Carolinas. More than tactical victories or destruction of Confederate morale, Sherman and his troops targeted civilians from white slaveholding families, notably the women, in order to punish those who promoted secession and contributed to the Confederate war effort. White southern women, however, actively resisted by expanding but not deviating from expectations of white, southern womanhood through fulfilling one of the most basic tenants- devout Confederate patriotism. From the motivations of Union soldiers to the responses of southern women, Frank argues expectations of femininity and masculinity shaped Sherman's March but that ultimately "Sherman's campaign failed to force elite white Georgia and Carolina women to abandon the nation that they had helped to create" (16).

To accomplish this, Frank divides her work topically, tracing the impact of Sherman's troops on slaveowning women. She begins with the preparations white, elite women in Georgia and the Carolinas took as Sherman's troops approached. Reports of Sherman's "hard war" had filtered back to these women who quickly realized their gender, wealth, and civilian status would not protect them. Many white southern women remained in their homes and readied themselves— from hiding valuables to mentally preparing themselves. As Frank convincingly argues, Sherman's March emboldened these women, who faced losing everything, to become staunch Confederate patriots. Frank then builds upon other scholars by revealing how southern white women enlarged expectations of womanhood to prepare for the war through nursing, fundraisers,

donations, and other similar measures. Rather than losing their femininity, this work expanded womanhood and demonstrated their commitment to the Confederacy. Resonating with arguments by Drew Gilpin Faust, LeAnn Whites, Marli Weiner, and many other gender scholars of the era, the more “masculine” or “public” roles southern, white women embraced were considered temporary and in service to the men who fought rather than a reversal. Essentially, gender expectations of “ideal womanhood” changed but not radically.

The strength of Frank’s work really emerges as she demonstrates the gendered and class-based approach Sherman took as his troops made their way through the area and interacted with the local women. Union troops sought to punish those they felt not only started the war but also continued to aid the Confederate war effort. White, elite women in particular were identified as “the strongest rebels” and therefore deserved to suffer the ravages of war (75). Soldiers invaded the most private space of ladies— the bedroom— to search for goods. Some tore women’s underwear to make handkerchiefs. Others attacked symbols of wealth and privilege, such as pianos. Soldiers even disrobed and, in some cases, raped Confederate women. Women resisted by verbally insulting the troops, stubborn silence when asked questions, and physically assaulting soldiers. Through weaving quotes from letters, journals, and newspapers, Frank provides an interesting narrative to support her claim that Sherman, his troops, and white southerners believed the campaign to be a deliberate, gendered tactic to punishing Confederates and destroying morale.

Sherman’s March succeeded in many ways but not, as Frank demonstrates, to crush elite, white southern women’s determination. Sherman sought “psychological destruction” through “destruction of those items that defined white female privilege in the American South” (8). Although his campaign threatened white, southern manhood and men’s “duty” to protect their families, Frank argues that the women loathed the soldiers for how they violated the privileges of womanhood and remained steadfast in devotion to the Confederate cause. These women continued to criticize the actions of Union soldiers as unfair and “uncivilized”— a belief that later supported the Lost Cause mentality in the region (136). Other studies, such as Alecia Long’s examination of General Benjamin Butler and the women of New Orleans in *Occupied Women*, find a similar end result with Union attempts to suppress southern women’s resistance. Frank then provides further support to the argument that many Confederate women who experienced the presence of Union soldiers felt far from compliant and defeated.

In developing *The Civilian War*, Frank painstakingly examined hundreds of sources for her argument and carefully crafts the parameters of her study. She is clear about her focus on elite, white women in Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Occasionally she does address soldiers' different encounters with African American women or women from other socioeconomic classes, which helps to illustrate the complexity of women's experiences and affirm the limitations of "true womanhood" during the period. Frank, for example, discusses how African American women in the region were regarded as being outside the bounds of respectability and sexually assaulted at higher rates. At times, however, the differences in class and race raise the question on how this affected women's— other than white, elite women's— morale and thereby the war effort.

Lisa Tendrich Frank's *The Civilian War* adds a needed perspective to the fields of gender studies and military history. Her meticulous work demonstrates Sherman's campaign targeted the wealthy as well as the ideals of white womanhood, bringing war into the domestic realm. She also shows why some women would remain devoted to the Confederacy in the last year of the war. Although a few works touch on the role of women and gender during Sherman's Campaign, Frank focuses on this aspect and provides a fuller, richer analysis of the gendered language used by Sherman, Union troops, and Confederate women to depict the central role of gender in the campaign.

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